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THE MAKING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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The term New Testament (*διαθήκη καινή*) is as old as the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31 [LXX 38:31]), where it is used of the compact to be made by Jehovah with his people in the latter days, and is translated "new covenant." From this passage and with this sense the phrase passed into the Epistle to the Hebrews (8:8; 9:15). In the earliest account of the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:25), the expression is used by Jesus of "the new covenant" ratified by his blood. It stands in a similar connection in the Gospel of Luke (22:20), though the text here is more than doubtful. In II Cor. 3:6 the expression occurs: "who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit, for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." In none of these texts does it have a literary sense, or refer to a book or collection of books. Indeed its use in this last passage ("the letter killeth") is as far as possible from such a meaning. And while the expression recurs from time to time in early Christian literature (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue*, 11:3, 4; 12:2; 34:1; 43:1; 51:3; 118:3; 122:5; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4:34:4), its use in the literary sense of our "New Testament" is not reflected before the time of Melito of Sardis, about 180 A.D. In the preface to his *Eclogae*, partly preserved in Eusebius (*H.E.* 4:26:14), Melito gives a list of "the ancient books" (*τῶν παλαιῶν βιβλίων*), "the books of the old covenant" (*τὰ τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης βιβλία*). While the literary sense ("the Old Testament") is usually understood in this passage, and this is felt to imply a "New Testament" collection of books, standing over against it, neither of these steps is altogether sure, and it is probable that we have even here only the old meaning, "the Old Covenant." Yet it is significant that Christians were already grouping the Law and the Prophets as the books of the Old Covenant, and it is clear that in this expres-

sion we are on the way toward the literary use first of the one term and then of the other. At the close of the second century Clement of Alexandria speaks of the "precepts of the Old Covenant (or Testament) and of the New" (*τῆς τε διαθήκης τῆς παλαιᾶς καὶ τῆς νέας*), probably employing the expression in the literary sense of a body of writings, and in Tertullian, a little later, the literary use of *Novum Testamentum* is unmistakable.

The motives that led the believers of the second century to collect their choicest writings into a New Testament are of the greatest interest and significance. It must not be supposed that such a collection was a foregone conclusion from the beginning, or that it was anticipated by the New Testament writers. The famous passage in I Timothy: "Every scripture inspired of God (*πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος*) is also profitable for teaching," etc. (3:16), has reference to the Old Testament and comes from a time when there was no other scripture which was deemed inspired. Paul's expression, "the letter killeth," and his attitude toward formal law expressed in scripture (Romans, Galatians) show how far he was from thinking of sharing in the making of a new scripture.

The earliest Christian documents that have been preserved to us (Thessalonians) are short, informal letters written by Paul about the middle of the first century to a church on the western shore of the Aegean. In the years that followed Paul wrote numerous other letters, and several of these were preserved by their recipients. Copies of them were sometimes requested, we may suppose, by neighboring churches or by Christian visitors from far away. Especially after Paul's imprisonment and execution (A.D. 64?), we may, if the case of Ignatius and his letters is any parallel, suppose that many a church that had known Paul would seek to secure copies of letters of his to other churches. Clement of Rome (A.D. 95) knows not only Romans, as we should expect, but I Corinthians as well. Thessalonica and Philippi would naturally share their letters, if Corinth and Rome did theirs, and Paul himself had expressly told the Colossians and Laodiceans to share theirs. Colossians, Philemon, and what we call Ephesians (probably a circular letter to the Asian churches,

and perhaps identical with Laodiceans, Col. 4:16) were delivered by the same messenger, and quite certainly all reached Colossae.

The Philippians early in the second century took the trouble to send to Polycarp at Smyrna for any letters of Ignatius that he might have or could secure; they would certainly have done as much for Paul. It is easy to see how by the end of the first century Philippi, Corinth, and Colossae would each be in possession of at the very least three letters of Paul's, and it seems probable that any central city of importance like Ephesus or Smyrna would in no long time come to possess two or even three of these groups. It is a significant fact that of all Paul's letters only two that were written to cities outside the Aegean basin have been preserved (Romans and Galatians). If Rome in the tenth decade had I Corinthians, it is reasonable to suppose that Romans was known in Corinth, where indeed it had been written. Similarly Galatians, the most impetuous and stirring of all Paul's letters, and one originally sent to several churches at once, would easily find its way into the Pauline collections that were growing up in the old Pauline centers about the Aegean. And so, early in the second century, the Aegean became in all probability the cradle of the Pauline collection.

Within a few years after Paul's death, the first record of the ministry of Jesus was written. According to an early tradition (Papias, A.D. 145), it was the work of Mark, the kinsman of Barnabas and the assistant of Paul, and was based upon his recollection of the discourses of Peter, who had recently died. This first gospel was soon after rewritten with the aid of other kindred materials, and so much improved and enlarged that the resulting book soon displaced in public favor the documents on which it had been based, the Gospel of Mark among the rest. From one of these constituent sources, it would seem, it took over the name of its author, the apostle Matthew, for an early tradition (Papias) ascribes to him an Aramaic collection of Jesus' sayings. Not many years later, Paul's friend Luke wrote his histories, a gospel based, like Matthew's, upon Mark, and a continuation of the story, the Acts of the Apostles, showing how the limited work originated by Jesus among the Jews of Galilee had extended to

the Greeks of Antioch, and finally of Rome, and resulted in the world-wide Christian movement in the full tide of which Luke and his readers found themselves. Thus at the close of the first century, individual churches or Christians were possessed of one or another of these, or possibly other, gospels. But that anyone had thought of putting forth two or more of them together, there is no evidence, nor would it seem a natural course, since all three duplicated each other in many particulars.

Where these gospels originated it is very difficult to say. But about the beginning of the second century a gospel was written at Ephesus which, by a new and striking interpretation of Jesus, sought to transplant Christianity from Jewish to Greek soil. It did not simply interpret Jesus in Jewish terms as Messiah or Christ, but found in him the Logos ("Word," "Reason") with which Greek thought had been so long concerned. Such a translation of the narrow Jewish designation into terms of Greek philosophy would commend Christianity to many in the Graeco-Roman world who had hitherto been repelled by its Jewish atmosphere and vocabulary. Indeed the Fourth Gospel may be characterized as the wedding of philosophy and revelation, and its influence upon Christian thought has been incalculable. We may not assume, however, that it was so esteemed from the first. It claimed the authority in some sense of the apostle John, and this must have helped its circulation. And it is not improbable that those who issued it at Ephesus soon found it desirable to conciliate partisans of the older gospels by including the best of these with it, and putting out the four gospels together. This would be an appropriate course, since John was meant to be less a parallel record than an interpretative supplement. At any rate, it seems altogether probable that it was in Asia, not far from A.D. 125, that the four gospels began to be known and used together. It is in the Gospel of Peter, written we know not where, and in Justin's *Apology*, written at Rome about A.D. 150, that we first find the four used side by side. Justin had a few years before come from Ephesus, where he had been converted to Christianity, and it was probably there, where the Gospel of John had been written, that he had become acquainted with the four gospels.

It was toward the middle of the second century that a movement began toward a Christian scripture, over against the Jewish. After the death of Paul the scattered churches, while still honoring him as an apostle, had gradually sunk back into a very Jewish type of life and thought. Their services were modeled upon those of the synagogue, and they studied the Jewish scripture as diligently and devoutly as the Jews themselves. It was in fact their Bible. Fixed forms of organization and church life (the pastoral epistles, Ignatius, the *Didache*) were thought necessary and were provided, in something of a Jewish spirit. The constant use of the Jewish scripture tended to increase and perpetuate these rigid tendencies, and the faith, spirituality, and freedom which characterized the work of Jesus and of Paul were in eclipse. At this juncture, toward the middle of the century, a certain Marcion of Pontus introduced a plan designed to emancipate the church from Judaism, and to restore the ascendancy of what he believed to be Pauline thought. The means by which he sought to achieve these ends were the substitution of a group of Christian writings for the Jewish scriptures, and the combination of the isolated churches into an organized body. The Christian writings which Marcion put forth as a substitute for the Jewish scriptures were the Gospel of Luke (but without Luke's name) and ten epistles of Paul, somewhat modified. His omission of the pastoral epistles is the first striking piece of external evidence against them. Upon this novel platform the able and energetic Marcion succeeded in uniting a great body of Christians all over the world. Justin complains that his followers were numerous in every nation (I *Apol.* 26:5). And his movement did not subside without having given to general Christianity a lesson of organization on the one hand, and a tentative collection of Christian scripture on the other. Whatever Christian canons were afterward formed, none could essentially better the fundamental structures of that first heretical New Testament, or omit one of its documents. All exhibit the gospel and the apostle, the record and the letters, and the eleven writings which Marcion collected are in them all.

The partial success of Marcion's Christian Bible and the subsequent acceptance and development of his idea by the Catholic

church clearly indicate that the thought of attaching authority and sacredness to some Christian books at least was not wholly new. The New Testament itself indicates that from the beginning utterances of Jesus were esteemed quite equal to the statutes and statements of the Old Testament. In Acts we read of the utterances of Christian prophets and prophetesses which were clearly recognized as inspired. When, as in the Apocalypse of John or, a generation later, the Shepherd of Hermas, a Christian prophet, like the literary prophets of the Old Testament, put his oracles in writing, his book must, if his prophetic vocation were still admitted, have been accepted as inspired, as it claimed to be. The existence and acceptance of such books, of which there were certainly three by A.D. 150 (John, Peter, Hermas), must have accustomed the churches to the idea of inspired Christian writings.

The gospel records into which the sayings of Jesus were early gathered came naturally to share in the esteem in which the sayings which so largely composed them were held. Especially when an apostle could be claimed as the author of such a record, its hold upon the respect of the churches was very strong. For as time went on, and erratic and divergent forms of Christian belief and life developed, the main body of Christians, searching for some fixed platform on which to base their belief and practice, found it in the teaching and conduct of the apostles. In the long conflict with the schismatics and heretics of the second century, it was to the apostles, as the spiritual executors of Jesus, the presumable depositaries of Christian truth, that the defenders of general Christianity appealed.

Just how early Christian writings came to be read in Christian meetings cannot definitely be determined. Paul charges the Thessalonians to see that his letter be read to all the brethren (I Thess. 5:27); and the reading of such letters may from the beginning have been at least an occasional part of the Christian service. That it was so at a later time the letter of Dionysius of Corinth to Soter of Rome, written about A.D. 170, clearly shows: "Today we have passed the Lord's holy day, in which we have read your epistle. From it, whenever we read it, we shall always be able to draw advice, as also from the former epistle which was written

to us through Clement" (Eusebius, *H.E.* 4:23:11). If letters of Clement of Rome and Soter were read in church in Corinth in the second century, it is easy to suppose that letters of Paul were. And it is worth noting that Clement of Rome (A.D. 95) refers his Corinthian readers to "the epistle of the blessed Paul the apostle" as though he expected them to be well acquainted with it, and to have easy access to it (I Clem. 47:1, 2).

Jesus, the prophets, the apostles: these were the new Christian authorities, fit to stand beside Moses and the prophets of old. And so when Marcion simply substituted them for the old, Christian feeling was not wholly outraged. Men felt that the Old Testament, widely known in the Septuagint version, was much too precious to be cast aside, and they charged Marcion with mutilating the very gospel and letters he canonized. But that he was blamed for canonizing them we do not hear.

The remains of Christian literature earlier than A.D. 180 are too meager to allow us to trace the working of these elements in detail. We know that Justin went from Ephesus to Rome and in writing his *Apology*, about A.D. 150, made use of our four gospels. It is natural to suppose that Justin knew these gospels before he left Ephesus for the west, and that they were jointly current in Asia by A.D. 135. About the same time the Gospel of Peter was written, incorporating elements of each of them. Ten years later, Marcion set about uniting the churches on the basis of his Christian scripture, of Luke, and ten letters of Paul: Galatians, I and II Corinthians, Romans, I and II Thessalonians, Laodiceans (= Ephesians), Colossians, Philippians, Philemon. Not only four gospels, then, but ten epistles of Paul were known in Rome and Asia in the second quarter of the second century, and at least one influential man had seen the propriety of linking gospel and epistle in a Christian scripture.

That Marcion shows acquaintance with but one gospel, at a time when Justin was using four, is less difficult to understand than how Justin should show so little acquaintance with the letters of Paul of which Marcion made so much. But only Justin's apologetic writings are known to us; and if we had his numerous other works, we might find more evidence of acquaintance with the letters

of Paul. Justin was furthermore rather strongly influenced by Johannine ideas, which may have overshadowed in his mind older types of Christian thought. It must be remembered, however, that Justin's pupil Tatian, returning to Syria about 170, put into circulation there his *Diatessaron*, a Syriac harmony made up of the interwoven four gospels. This was pretty certainly unaccompanied by Pauline or other letters and remained for a long time the Bible of the Syrian church. Tatian is the first man who is definitely known to have expressly co-ordinated the four gospels in any such way, and the fact that he afterward became a schismatic did not deter the church from following his example.

The activity of those gifted but eccentric teachers who founded and built up the early schismatic bodies was at its height about the middle of the second century, and leaders of saner and more conventional types of Christianity had long been seeking some corrective for their work. These efforts resulted, about A.D. 180, in the Catholic movement, which sought to unite the scattered churches into one general body, with one concise symbol (the so-called Apostles' Creed), one type of organization (the episcopate), and one body of Christian scripture, which should authoritatively embody the purest Christian tradition. The men who devised this plan were in a high degree practical and farsighted, and their plan was eminently successful. These very facts show, however, that their body of scripture cannot have been a great innovation, but was probably purposely made up of these Christian writings which already commanded the widest acceptance and respect. The four gospels of Justin and Tatian and the ten letters of Marcion made up the bulk of this new collection. Our earliest clear view of it is in the pages of Irenaeus (A.D. 185), a man of Asian origin, whose mature life was spent at Lyons in Gaul. In the course of his great work *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus mentions twenty-one Christian writings which appear in our New Testament. Besides the four gospels and nine letters of Paul (not Philemon), he has the Acts, the three pastoral letters (I and II Timothy, Titus), three catholic epistles (I Peter, and I and II John), and the Apocalypse. Whether he had the other catholics (James, Jude, II Peter, III John) and Hebrews is very

doubtful; Philemon he probably did have, since he knew the other nine letters of Paul so well. These writings, or some of them, Irenaeus freely co-ordinates with scripture, law, and prophets. But he does not scruple to quote as scripture the Shepherd of Hermas (*H.* 4:20:2), the prophetic claims of which he seems to have allowed.

Such was the condition of the New Testament of Gaul toward the close of the second century. A very similar condition prevailed, according to Tertullian, in North Africa about that time. Tertullian accepts the four gospels and Acts, thirteen letters of Paul, one epistle each of Jude, John, and Peter, and the Apocalypse of John. He was familiar with Hebrews, but held it to be by Barnabas and so uncanonical. Both Tertullian and Irenaeus emphatically affirm their belief in the authenticity of the Christian tradition handed down and preserved in the church at Rome, and it is of interest to compare the only Roman document of their day dealing with the New Testament canon, that has come down to us, the Muratorian Fragment. The Latin of it is so misspelt and distorted as to leave its meaning doubtful at some points, but the general purport is fairly plain; the writer accepts the our gospels and Acts, thirteen letters of Paul, three catholic epistles (Jude, I and II John), the Book of Wisdom, and the Apocalypses of John and Peter; though at this last point some would amend the text. The Shepherd of Hermas is mentioned, but is not reckoned with the others; Irenaeus' quotation of it as scripture has already been noted.

These three witnesses agree in acknowledging the four gospels, Acts, thirteen letters of Paul, the Apocalypse of John, and one epistle of John; that is, our New Testament, wanting Hebrews and six catholic epistles. The three agree in omitting Hebrews, James, II Peter, and III John. One or two of them accept one or more of the other catholic epistles, Wisdom and the Apocalypse of Peter. The Shepherd of Hermas seems to be almost canonically esteemed by Irenaeus (A.D. 185); it is set on a lower level in the Muratorian (*ca.* A.D. 200), and vehemently repudiated by Tertullian as a "Shepherd of adulterers."

Even in the home of the Catholic movement, then, the canon

was by no means fixed in A.D. 200, nor did it reach definite and permanent limits until nearly two centuries later. Clement of Alexandria sought and found inspiration in wider fields than his western contemporaries. With them, he did not acknowledge James, II Peter, and III John, but he freely quoted Hermas and he made a positive contribution to the New Testament in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which he, on the authority of "the blessed presbyter," doubtless Pantaenus, declared Pauline and apostolic. This view soon came to prevail in the East, but it was late in the fourth century before the West accepted it, finally yielding to its apostolic claims. The East was just as reluctant to admit the Apocalypse, with its dangerous chiliasm, into its canon. The persecutions of the early centuries exercised a strange accelerating influence upon the canonizing process. Christians called on to deliver up their sacred books had to ask themselves with a new earnestness what writings they might give up without scruple and what it would be apostasy to surrender. Yet early in the fourth century Eusebius could repeat Origen's division of New Testament writings into accepted, rejected, and disputed. In the last list, Eusebius places five catholic epistles: II and III John, II Peter, James, Jude; almost exactly those which Irenaeus, Tertullian, and the Muratorian omitted or disagreed upon. The canon of the catholic epistles was still uncertain in the East, and so continued into the fifth century, when Syria at least still refused four catholics and the Apocalypse (Chrysostom, the Peshito). Our present canon is first set forth by Athanasius in his festal letter of A.D. 367, and again affirmed by the Council of Carthage, thirty years later. But Gregory of Nazianzus (†389-90) clearly omits the Apocalypse. Amphilochius of Iconium (†ca. 394) says that the majority call it spurious, and Chrysostom (†407) makes no use of it. It does not appear in the great historic Syrian canon, the Peshito; and only after a thousand years found its way into the Armenian scripture, through the agency of Nerses of Tarsus, about 1198. The Greek church indeed does not use the Apocalypse in its church lessons, either "gospel" or "apostle," although ostensibly admitting it into its canon of scripture. Thus while Egypt and the West gradually accepted the whole *corpus catholicum*

(seven epistles) and the Apocalypse, the East only very reluctantly adopted the lesser catholic epistles and steadfastly refused the Apocalypse.

The earliest extended manuscripts of the New Testament that have come down to us belong to the fourth and fifth centuries. The oldest of these, the Vaticanus, unfortunately breaks off at Heb. 9:14. Sinaiticus, of the fourth century, has the full Athanasian New Testament, with Barnabas and Hermas following the Apocalypse. Alexandrinus, of the fifth century, follows the Apocalypse with I and II Clement, which were accepted in Egypt as canonical as late as the time of Abu'l Barakat (†1363). The Ethiopic New Testament still contains thirty-five books; the Clementines and the Synodos being added to our twenty-seven. Taking Christendom the world over, then, the canon has never been fully settled. Syrian, Greek, Armenian, Egyptian, and Abyssinian churches have all varied from each other and from the West.

That the principal writings which enter into our New Testament were well known in the East and West at the end of the second century is very clear. The movement to fix upon some of these as pre-eminently or even exclusively suitable to be read in church seems to have begun in Rome. It was in this sense that the Muratorian writer put forth his list: Hermas, he says, may be read, but never in church among either prophets or apostles. To this group of writings the Alexandrians added Hebrews under the impression that it was Paul's. Our present list appears first in Athanasius (A.D. 367), and the West adopted it at Carthage in 397. That the church was still by no means united upon it is evidenced by many an eastern father and canon; only the West stood firmly upon it, and with its increasingly powerful organization made acquiescence in it more and more complete. While what was aimed at from the outset was an exclusive list, of which it could be said, "These, and these only, may be read in church beside the Old Testament scriptures," some concessions had, in time, to be made in the direction of greater inclusiveness (always, be it observed, to writings for which apostolic origin was claimed) and some sifting-out of books which the general Christian consciousness could not, it developed, approve (Apocalypse of Peter),

or accept as apostolic (Hermas, Barnabas, I and II Clement). That the great eastern bodies on the outskirts of catholic Christianity never wholly concurred in all this is evidence that canonization was the first great step in that Catholic movement which preserved the church through the age of schism, and to which in a real sense we owe the New Testament. And when it is remembered that no ancient and few mediaeval Greek manuscripts contain all our New Testament, without the addition of extraneous works (Clement, Barnabas, Hermas), while many a Latin New Testament manuscript includes the spurious Laodiceans, it will be seen that there is truth in the statement that not until the invention of printing did the New Testament canon become definite and uniform even for the western world.